NEWS ANALYSIS: 1-1321 AUGUST 20, 1976
CHARLES MEDD/KANSAS CITY

ELECTION '76 -- AND NOW THE CAMPAIGN

ANNCR:

HAVING COMPLETED THEIR NATIONAL CONVENTION IN KANSAS CITY, THE REPUBLICANS ARE NOW GETTING READY FOR THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN. VOA NEWS ANALYST CHARLES MEDD LOOKS AHEAD:

VOICE:

(OPT) THE REPUBLICANS HAD TWO MISSIONS IN KANSAS CITY-- THE SIMPLER ONE OF CHOOSING CANDIDATES AND THE FAR MORE DIFFICULT TASK OF PUTTING THEIR SPLINTERED MINORITY PARTY BACK TOGETHER. WITH THE NOMINATION OF GERALD FORD, PARTY LEADERSHIP IS CLEARLY IN HIS HANDS FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE HE MOVED INTO THE WHITE HOUSE JUST TWO YEARS AGO. AND THE DRAMATIC LAST-MINUTE APPEARANCE AT THE CONVENTION PLATFORM OF RONALD REAGAN, THE MAN HE DEFEATED IN A STRUGGLE FOR THE NOMINATION, GAVE THE PARTY AT LEAST THE APPEARANCE OF UNITY. (END OPT)

THE REPUBLICANS ARRIVED IN KANSAS CITY FACED WITH GLOOMY STATISTICS ON ALL SIDES, FIGURES THAT SUGGESTED TO SOME ITS EVENTUAL COLLAPSE AS A MAJOR POLITICAL FORCE. THE REPUBLICANS REPRESENT ONLY ABOUT ONE-FIFTH OF THE NATION'S REGISTERED VOTERS AND THEY OCCUPY ONLY ONE-THIRD OF THE SEATS IN CONGRESS, AND EVEN LESS OF THE IMPORTANT ELECTIVE POSITIONS AT STAKE AT LOCAL LEVELS. VIRTUALLY EVERY MAJOR POLITICAL OPINION SURVEY GIVES DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE JIMMY CARTER A COMMANDING LEAD -- ONE THAT NARROWED SLIGHTLY JUST PRIOR TO THE REPUBLICAN CONVENTION AND SHOULD NARROW EVEN FURTHER NOW THAT THE REPUBLICANS HAVE STOPPED WAGING WAR ON EACH OTHER.

BUT THE NUMERICAL GAP REMAINS FORMIDABLE AND THE REPUBLICANS HAVE JUST A LITTLE MORE THAN TWO MONTHS TO CLOSE IT. ALONG THE

WAY THEY WILL FACE THREE MAJOR BURDENS: THE HIGH RATE OF UNEMPLOYMENT; THE STILL LINGERING IMPACT OF THE WATERGATE SCANDALS; AND GOVERNOR CARTER'S APPEAL AS A POLITICAL OUTSIDER--WITH HIS PROMISE TO UPLIFT THE TARNISHED IMAGE OF THE WASHINGTON ESTABLISHMENT.

THE REPUBLICANS FOR ALL THEIR PROBLEMS, HOWEVER, HAVE POLITICAL ASSETS THAT CAN AND WILL BE EXPLOITED. THEY WILL POINT OUT THAT THE APPEALING FRESHNESS OF THE MAN FROM GEORGIA IS A POOR SUBSTITUTE FOR EXPERIENCE IN BOTH NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, AND THAT IN TWO SHORT DIFFICULT YEARS, GERALD FORD HAS RESTORED TRUST AND DECENCY TO THE WHITE HOUSE, HAS PRESIDED OVER A MARKEDLY IMPROVED ECONOMY, ESPECIALLY IN THE SENSITIVE AREA OF INFLATION, AND IS THE FIRST INCUMBENT PRESIDENT SINCE NINETEEN FIFTY-SIX TO ENTER AN ELECTION CAMPAIGN WITH HIS COUNTRY AT PEACE.

THE FORECASTS ALL POINT TO A DEMOCRATIC VICTORY IN NOVEMBER, BUT IRONICALLY, WHAT MAY BE THE REPUBLICANS' BIGGEST POLITICAL BLESSING IS THE FACT THAT THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN DOING THEFORECASTING IN THIS STRANGELY UNPREDICTABLE ELECTION YEAR, HAVE BEEN CONSISTENTLY WRONG FROM THE START.

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